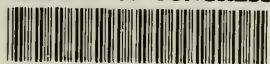


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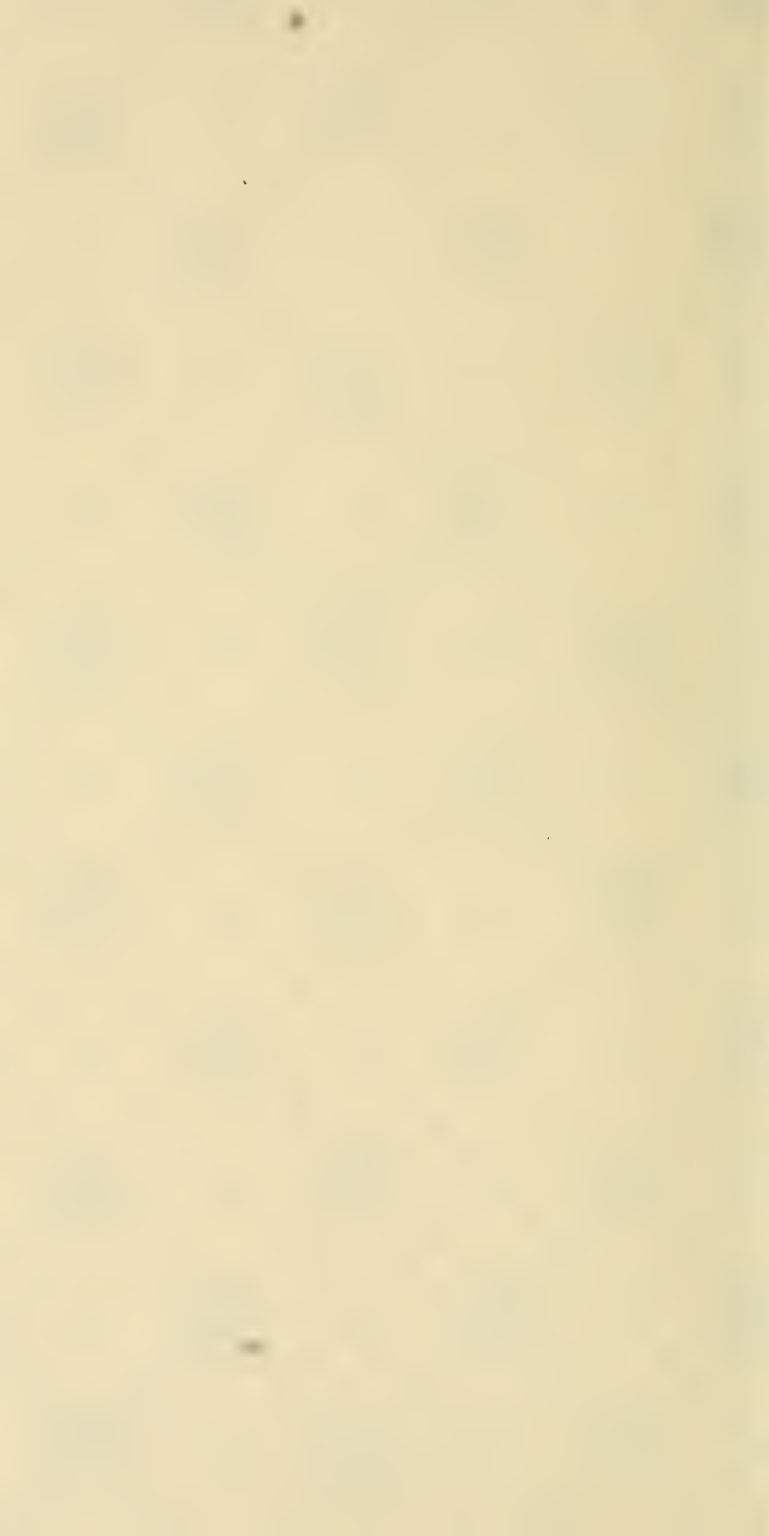


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THE STORY OF

A PRIVATE SOLDIER

IN

THE REVOLUTION.

By JOHN FOSTER.

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GIVEN BEFORE THE MANCHESTER HISTORIC
ASSOCIATION, JUNE 18, 1902.

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The Story of a Private Soldier in the Revolution

AN ADDRESS BY JOHN FOSTER, DELIVERED BEFORE THE MANCHESTER HISTORIC ASSOCIATION, JUNE 18, 1902.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Historic Association:—The morning sun of the twentieth century shines upon a magnificent era. Civilization has made wonderful strides in the past hundred years. The arts of war, no less than those of peace, have reached in our minds the plane of perfection. Our armies on the land, and our navy on the sea, are perfect in discipline and equipment. We have an arm that has a deadly range at a distance of two and one-half miles. We have an ordinance that will send a 1000-pound ball through an 11-inch armor plate, at a distance of 12 miles. Our military and naval commanders are trained in the best schools in the world, and the rank and file are disciplined by that training. Contemplating these facts, let us draw a comparison.

Let us turn from the conditions of today, back to the situation of a century and a quarter ago. From the drilled and skilled professional soldier, to the untrained yeomen of 1775, who stood behind those clumsy flintlock muskets, grimly waiting the approach of the best drilled soldiers of Europe.

History tells us much of brave deeds of commanding officers, of how they fought and won; but of the sturdy fellows who stood behind the guns, poorly paid, miserably fed, and scantily equipped, and fought through that dreary period of seven years, we have left but little individual record.

It is of one, who as a private soldier in the Revolution, bore an honorable part, that I wish to tell you tonight.

Moses Fellows, my mother's grandfather, was born in Plais-

tow, N. H., Aug. 9, 1755. He removed to Salisbury, N. H., with his parents, when 11 years of age, and settled on a tract of wild land on the slopes of Kearsarge mountain.

Their life was full of frontier incidents. Occasionally an Indian scare, now and then, a bear or deer was hunted, and killed, to replenish the larder. At the age of 18 he killed a moose on the Kearsarge.

Under such conditions the youth developed into a young man of rugged constitution and iron nerve, and when the news of Lexington and Concord came up the valley of the Merrimack, he, with eight others from Salisbury, hastened to enlist in Captain Baldwin's Company, of John Stark's Regiment, and hurried to the scene of action.

At the Battle of Bunker Hill, Stark's command and a body of 200 Connecticut men were stationed at the rail fence, the line extending to Mystic river. Their ammunition was limited to twelve rounds to a man. The stern order ran along the line, "Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes, and then aim at their waistbands." Thus the New Hampshire boys waited the approach of the British regulars on the morning of June 17, 1775.

When the enemy had reached a certain point, the order to fire was given, and the 800 men under Stark, went to work as coolly as though they were hoeing corn on their native hills, firing slowly and deliberately, seeking to make every shot tell. Captain Baldwin went down, but the Salisbury men fought on till the last round had been exhausted, and Moses Fellows found himself with a single charge of powder, and no ball left; but the boy from Kearsarge rammed home the powder, left the ramrod in the barrel, and blazed away at close range. The discharge was effective, for a Redcoat was spitted by the novel projectile.

The result of the fight at Bunker Hill, is history. Though in fact it was gained by the British, the moral effect was a victory for the Americans. The colonists demonstrated to themselves

and the world that they could *fight*, that they were in earnest, and that their colors were up to stay.

After the battle, Colonel Stark's regiment was stationed at Winter Hill, near Boston.

On the 8th of September, 1775, Moses Fellows, and one of his Salisbury mates, secured a transfer to Captain Dearborn's Company, which was to join an expedition up the Kennebec river, through the wilderness, with Quebec as an objective point, under Benedict Arnold.

And, as I reach the name of Arnold in this narrative, I am constrained to diverge slightly from my topic.

Benedict Arnold—history has said little of him, but what it has said, has been spoken in words of ignominy and shame, and in a great measure justly.

What I have to say is this: What a dismal collapse of a brilliant career was Arnold's downfall. He had a grievance, and in a certain measure a just one. For reasons that have not been fully explained, he was jumped in rank by another officer. So was Stark, who retired from the service upon his dignity. But instead of following Stark's example, Arnold, who might have figured in history as the Sheridan of the Revolution, sacrificed his honor and his name, and disappeared forever.

We return to the Quebec expedition. They went aboard the vessel at Newburyport, on Sept. 19, 1775, and sailed up the Kennebec river, to Fort Western, now Augusta. Two women, wives of soldiers, accompanied the expedition throughout; a Mrs. Greer and a Mrs. Warner. At Fort Western they disembarked, and took to boats with their provisions and stores, went up the river to the Great Carrying Place, so called, where they landed, and went 12 miles over land, to Dead river, carrying their boats and provisions, four men bearing a barrel of flour hung on two poles by ropes. The boats were turned bottom up, and carried upon the men's shoulders. Thus they traveled to the head of Dead river, through the trackless forest of Maine; arriving at that point, they divided their provisions, and each

man took his share. Then they traveled five miles over the Highlands, to a river that runs into Skedack pond, followed down the river to the pond, went around the east and north sides of the pond, until they came to the Chaudire river, in Canada, the outlet of the pond. They traveled down the east side of the river, ten or twelve days, to the French settlements, which they reached the 9th day of November, 1775, followed down the St. Lawrence river to Point Levi. On the 13th of November they crossed the river, and went to the Plains of Abraham, but not having a force strong enough to attack the enemy, they went back up the river, eleven miles to Point Autrembles, and stayed there until General Montgomery came down from Montreal, with his cannon and mortars.

During their journey through the wilderness, their provisions were exhausted, which caused much suffering from hunger.

After their provisions were divided at the head of Dead river many of the men were not economical with their food, consequently, were soon without anything to eat. He was prudent of his, and was fortunate enough to kill a partridge, which he boiled, made a supper and breakfast out of the broth, carrying the meat with him for future use. By so doing, he did not suffer as much as some less prudent. The men were compelled to dig roots, cook and eat them. An old dog that had followed the army, was killed, and eaten by the hungry men, even to his feet, nose and tail.

Their shoes gave out and many made moccasins out of raw moose hide. He secured the skin off the hind legs of a moose, and by using the joint skins for the heel of his moccasin, made quite a comfortable article of footwear. Others made them Indian fashion.

Before they got through the wilderness, some of the men boiled their moose hide moccasins, ate them and drank the broth. The last two or three days many of them had absolutely nothing to eat.

After they reached the French settlements, they were well

treated, and everything was supplied them that the Frenchmen could provide for so many men.

In after life, when relating his war experiences, he said, "The French were good to the American soldiers."

On the 31st day of December, 1775, they moved down to Quebec, starting at two o'clock in the morning, and by daylight began the attack on the British stronghold, General Montgomery, leading the attack, fell at the first fire. General Morgan, his successor, kept up the fight, until unable to advance in the face of such tremendous odds. He took refuge in the neighboring houses, where he was finally compelled to surrender.

Arnold, on the other side of the city, was severely wounded in his leg, while bravely fighting at the head of his troops, and was borne to the rear. Captain Morgan, with sixty men, of whom Moses Fellows was one, went to within twenty rods of the Palace Gate, and discharged five mortars at the city. They were fired upon from the castle, with double-headed shot. This was about the last of the battle. Arnold's command then retreated.

Smallpox broke out among the troops before the battle, and from this cause the little army was badly disabled.

About the middle of January, 1776, all of Arnold's men who were not taken prisoners, left for Montreal.

On arriving there, the time for which he enlisted having expired, he was discharged. They left with their baggage, for Fort Chambly, where he enlisted for two and one half months, after serving his time out. He was detained in the service four weeks, then discharged.

He and his Salisbury comrade, John Bowen, with others, started for home, a distance of about 500 miles; on the journey, someone killed a partridge; another killed a crow; they skinned them and put the partridge's skin on the crow's body, and exchanged the false partridge at the first tavern they came to, for some rum to cheer them up.

He arrived home about the first of June, 1776, having been gone a little over a year, he resumed his labors on the farm.

In April, 1777, he re-enlisted for three years' service as Orderly-Sergeant, in Captain Gray's Company; along with him enlisted eight other Salisbury men, at this time.

This Company was assigned to Colonel Scammell's Regiment, known as the Third New Hampshire, and immediately went to Ticonderoga, where they kept garrison, until the night of the 5th of July following, when they evacuated the Fort, and it fell into the hands of the British, under General Burgoyne.

From there they went to Fort Ann, and were in the battle of the Blockhouse. From Fort Ann they went to Fort Edward, arriving about midnight, and camped without tents. He was taken sick there with fever and ague, and taken to the hospital at Albany, New York.

He next joined the army at Bemis Heights, near Stillwater, where they fortified.

On the 19th of September, 1777, about 10 o'clock in the morning, the British army advanced to attack in three columns. General Burgoyne commanded the centre, General Fraser, the right, and Generals Phillips and Riedesel the left wing. Upon the front, and flanks of the columns, hung Indians, Tories and Canadians.

General Gates sent out Captain Morgan, with his riflemen, and Major Dearborn with his infantry.

Captain Morgan passed unobserved, through a piece of woods, and drove back a party of Canadians and Indians, and unexpectedly came upon the main body of the British troops. His men were scattered. For a moment he was left alone, but a shrill whistle brought his sharp shooters around him. At this moment, Colonels Cilley and Scammell, coming to his aid with the New Hampshire Regiments, a sharp contest ensued for a time. Then a lull followed. The British brought up their cannon, and the patriots, the Connecticut militia under General Cook. At 3 o'clock p. m., the fight began with great vigor.

The patriots captured the British cannon, who, in turn, rallied and recaptured them. This was done several times. The battle raged with great fury, until darkness compelled the patriots to quietly withdraw to their intrenchments. Twice during the evening there was sharp skirmishing, and the last American did not leave the field until 11 o'clock p. m. The losses in this battle were heavy, on both sides.

The armies lay within cannon shot of each other until the 7th of October, when the British marched out and formed in double ranks within a mile of the American camp, and waited events. Morgan, with his riflemen, Poor's New Hampshire brigade, and Dearborn's Light Infantry were ordered to attack. Steadily the New Hampshire men mounted up the slope, reciving one volley, and then with a yell, charged for the guns. So fierce was the fight that one piece was taken and retaken several times. The British lines finally broke. At the second charge of the impetuous Arnold, leading a part of Learned's Brigade, the British centres gave way, and the Americans urged the pursuit to the very intrenchments of the enemy.

At night, General Burgoyne evacuated a part of his intrenchments and the next day renewed his retreat, but being hemmed in on all sides, he finally surrendered his army, with arms and stores, on the 17th of October, 1777. Thus ended the battle of Saratoga.

After this fight, they went to Fishkill, and from there, marched to Whitemarsh, to join General Washington. From Whitemarsh they went to Valley Forge, starting Dec. 11, 1777. It was a long and painful march of eight days.

On reaching Valley Forge, they had to build their own hut encampments, cutting down trees, and erecting log houses for their winter quarters. Their sufferings at Valley Forge have hardly been equalled in the history of any war. They were without food, without clothes, and without fuel. Straw could not be obtained. Soldiers who were enfeebled by hunger, benumbed with cold, were obliged to sleep on the bare ground.

Sickness followed, and within three weeks 2000 men were unfit for duty.

While Washington was walking with a distinguished foreign officer one day along the streets, among the huts, they heard voices through the open crevices between the logs, saying, "No pay, no clothes, no medicine, no food, no rum."

Meat was not seen for weeks at a time, and frequently when it did appear, the rib bones would be round, indicating "horse beef." The terrible hardships at Valley Forge caused the death of four men in Captain Gray's Company, who enlisted from Salisbury when he did. Their names were: Ephraim Heath, Reuben Greeley, Philip Lufkins, and William Bayley.

They died in March and April, 1778.

Early in February, 1778, Baron Steuben arrived in camp, and was received with great enthusiasm. He soon had the army drilling under his supervision. He was very particular in every detail, himself inspecting each soldier's musket and accoutrements. He was obliged to use an interpreter to explain what he wanted to do, or have done. When things did not go to suit him he would swear in the French, German and Russian languages, all at once, to the no slight amusement of the soldiers.

Towards spring a new quartermaster was appointed, in the person of General Greene, and he soon changed the condition of affairs. Provisions began to appear in camp, and the half-starved soldiers, when well fed, wore a smile. Everything began to improve, and the men began to tell stories and crack jokes.

The American army left Valley Forge, crossed the Delaware river, and was ordered to pursue the enemy in the Jerseys. On the 27th of June, 1778, his detachment was ordered to Monmouth, and the next day, the 28th, a hot and sultry morning, they met the enemy, and a severe engagement was fought, with indecisive results. In the midst of the battle he saw a British officer with a horse. He took possession of them, conducted them to the rear, and delivered the officer to the proper guards, and eventually sold the horse for \$40.00

Many men died from the effects of the heat alone, during the battle, the mercury standing at 96 above zero, in the shade.

A few days after the Battle of Monmouth, they were ordered to White Plains. They moved very slowly, it being very warm, and numbers died from the heat on the march. Some of the men were so thirsty that when they came to a well or spring of water, they drank so much they died almost instantly. He drank sparingly until his thirst was quenched.

While at White Plains he was taken sick, and removed to the hospital at Tarrytown. After his recovery he returned to his regiment, which soon went into winter quarters at Middlebrook, New Jersey.

In the spring of 1779 his regiment was assigned to General Sullivan's army, under orders to march against the Indians in the western part of New York, to avenge the Wyoming and Cherry Valley massacres. This expedition was planned and ordered by General Washington.

It was late in August when they started from Wyoming, Pennsylvania, going northward, up the Susquehanna river, drawing their stores and artillery up the river in 150 boats. At Tioga, New York, they were joined by General Clinton, with 1000 New York troops, who had marched from Albany, up the Mohawk river and Canajoharie creek, to Otsego lake; thence down the Susquehanna to Tioga.

The result of this expedition was almost the total annihilation of the Six Nations; their homes and crops were destroyed, many of their braves were slain, and whole tribes were scattered.

After they returned from this campaign they went into quarters at Morristown, New Jersey, where they suffered nearly, if not quite, as much as they did at Valley Forge.

The lack of bread, meat and clothes, formed the burden of their story. They went thirty-six days on half rations, and less.

The Continental money was so depreciated that \$40.00 in bills was worth only \$1.00 in silver. A soldier's pay for six months would hardly buy a dinner. A pair of boots cost \$600.00



in bills, and a glass of rum, when it could be found at all, could not be purchased for less than \$25.00. Washington was forced to make requisition upon the surrounding country, for food and raiment for his men. The farmers voluntarily sent in provisions, shoes, coats and blankets, while the women, ever loyal, met together to knit stockings and sew garments for the needy troops.

Spring came at last, and the time for which he enlisted having expired, he was honorably discharged as an Orderly-Sergeant, at West Point, on the 20th day of April, 1780, and returned to his home at Salisbury.

Upon his discharge, the orders were to turn in to the Government all arms that passed inspection. Moses Fellows hated to part with his dear old gun, which he had carried for five years, and so it happened that when the inspecting officer came around to examine his weapons the lock of his gun was missing, but after the officer had passed on, it was fortunately discovered in the tail of his coat.

During his long life after the war, the old gun occupied a conspicuous position, hanging on hooks, over the fireplace, in his Salisbury home, and is now preserved as a much-treasured relic by one of his descendants. (His name further appears in the records of Salisbury, as enlisting again in the spring of 1780, and again the record says he enlisted in November, 1781, for three years' service, and his name was returned to Colonel Stickney. These enlistments might have been as minute man, or home guard, but after his discharge in 1780, he did not return to active service.)

After retiring from the army he gave his attention to clearing and developing the farm, where he lived, until his death. After March 4, 1831, he drew a pension from the Government of \$100.00 a year, until his decease, which occurred Jan. 30, 1846, aged 90 years, 5 months and 21 days. In his declining years it was a pleasure for him to meet his old comrades in arms, around his fireside, and talk over the scenes of army life, and the children of the neighborhood would gather around the old man, and learn

from him, lessons of patriotism, as illustrated by his stirring experiences in the past. Before their eager, wondering eyes, he would develop his old campaigns ; he would don his faded Continental regalia, and explain the manual of army drill as taught him by Baron Steuben sixty years before : with a trail of lighted powder he would illustrate the blaze of Continental fire, which met the Red Coats at Bunker Hill, and the young lads, some of whom were to act in similar scenes at Little Round Top and Cemetery Ridge, would raise a boyish cheer for the brave old veteran.

He lies buried in the old cemetery, at Salisbury South Road, and a substantial granite monument, recently erected by his descendants, marks his honored grave.

I have given you the story of one who bore an humble but honorable part in the struggle which fixed the destiny of a mighty nation. Imperfect, and inaccurate, in a measure, no doubt, for it has been handed down, without authentic record, through four generations, but I have desired to do it, so far as able, to the end that in some century to come, when some other Gilmore, or Gould, or Brown, may be poring over the musty records of an ancient, and long since defunct Historical Society, they may find there in the catacombs of a remote period, the story of a private soldier in the American Revolution. I believe sincerely in the aim of this Association : That we should perpetuate the record of those who have aided in building the substantial structure of our great Republic, that we should profit from their stern example.

“Remembering still the rugged road our venerable fathers trod,
When they, through toil and danger pressed, to gain their glorious
bequest,
And from each lip, the watchword fell,
To those who followed,—GUARD IT WELL.”

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